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THE
PHILOSOPHY OF THOUGHT.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE FREE CHURCH
COLLEGE, HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA.

SESSION 1852-3.

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LECTURE.

The commencement of another period of study is an event peculiarly interesting; fraught at once with agreeable memories and pleasing anticipations. The progress of mind from its dawning to its complete development, is an event or circumstance attended with a pleasure which no other circumstance or event can boast. We are variously constituted, possessed of a complex nature, and so, susceptible of varied pleasure or happiness. Of all the pleasures, however, of which we are susceptible, perhaps no one affords a finer delight than that of which the mind itself is the source in its own exercises, or in its communion with other minds. The right state of the affections, which terminate on being, and which cannot be without their object, is a circumstance of more importance than the mere operation of mind, than any exercise of the intellectual faculties merely; but thought is, undoubtedly, the grand exercise of the rational being, without which, emotion or affection might be pleasing, but would not be very profound; since, to every emotion or affection, as philosophers say, some conception (thought) is necessary; and it is in proportion to our knowledge of the range of truth, that any truth, the most familiar, can charm or please, and to our estimate of being, that being itself can be the object of our emotions or affections. Thought is the staple of mind: emotion or feeling is the state, however, for which thought exists, or in order to which it is mainly valuable. It has a value in itself: it is connected with material and practical results; but a state of emotion is the ultimate end of all thought; while its immediate result may be some of the finest feelings of our nature. The mind must be somehow exercised. It may be exercised upon objects as varied as there are objects to call forth its faculties. These are not limited. They are bounded only by the wants and necessities of our nature, by the resources of enjoyment, and by the subjects of thought and inquiry. As we are placed in this world—in our present condition—the practical ends of life form the great, and, indeed, the paramount, objects for which the mind thinks, and the hands toil. How much thought is expended

upon these!—and they must necessarily form the engrossing objects of interest and concern. How we may live, how life may be sustained, is the first inquiry, and forms the first object for which we think and act. It is the first inquiry in a rude state, and it must be previously supposed in every state. The only difference between a rude and a civilized state is as to the answer to the inquiry, or the way in which the object which it supposes is to be gained. The Savage never gets beyond this inquiry, except it be in so far as those defensive or aggressive operations are concerned, by which hostile tribes are attacked, or their invasions are resisted. With the necessities of his nature as a condition, however, or an object to be met, man is not contented to be limited. There are capacities within him which seek their development, and will not be confined by such narrow boundaries. Necessities are multiplied, or more than the absolute necessities of life are sought. Physical wants demand variety, or seek it, and different modes of ministering to these are invented or resorted to. Man's physical condition advances, his wants extend, and the necessities become the comforts, and the elegancies, of life. And what, accordingly, do we find in a civilized state of society, but improved modes of living, with the elegancies of social existence, and the refinements of social intercourse? It is in the progress to this point that many of the arts and sciences are discovered or invented. Undoubtedly it was in this very progress that science and art made their first advances. When mind is awakened, improvement goes forward; and the useful and elegant arts are no more than mind expended upon those materials which lie in its way, and may be fashioned to gratify taste, as well as minister to utility. The qualities of substances develop themselves, their relations and laws are detected, the universe is ranged; and science is but the treasured results, or aggregate amount, of separate observations and individual discovery. Science and art, however, come to be pursued for their own sake, and the tract of scientific investigation, and the high walks of art, present separate directions to mind, and at once beautify and enoble life. As society progresses, communities are formed, nations grow, civil polities arise, laws are constructed, history creates itself. What a field for thought is here! But mind does not range within these limits alone. It finds itself united to a physical organization, and it utters itself in words. It clothes itself in the airy forms of expression: it speaks or imprints itself in language; and thus ideas are fixed, and the empire of mind is enlarged. Language itself is an interesting subject of investigation, for the principles on which it is formed, and the changes which, in the progress of time, and the lapse of events, it has undergone. But you can conceive what an

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instrument language must be to mind, how it must facilitate its operations, and add precision to its powers; while there seems to be a direct adaptation between ideas and their expression, a mutual influence by which beauty is conferred upon the one, and a mould or impress is given to the other. It has been a question whether language was of human origin, or was divinely imparted. And that question has reference not to the organs of speech, which, of course, were divinely bestowed, but to speech itself, words, with all the parts into which language divides itself, or of which it is composed. There can be little doubt, at least, that the tendencies or wants which gave occasion to language, and the principles which regulate its construction, were so much a part of mind itself, or our compound nature, that the formation of language was about as necessary a result, as are the arts or sciences of our peculiar intellectual constitution. The simplest elements of language, we have reason to believe, were conferred upon man at first, else how could the first pair talk with each other, or both hold converse with God in the garden? That in its principles and essential elements it was divinely imparted, that to this extent language was a divine endowment, cannot be doubted; and it indicates its divine origin. What a vehicle for the finest conceptions and emotions! What an adaptation between the mind and its modes of expression! How the one fills the other with life and meaning!—while the latter, again, suits every varying idea and emotion of the former—now rouses with energy, and now soothes with pleasure, or transports with delight. Having found such a vehicle, mind freely expatiates in every region. How much we owe to language perhaps cannot be told, for the exsursiveness of mind—for the fineness of its imaginations, and the subtlety of its conceptions. This we know, that in a rude state, language is possessed of few abstract terms, and, accordingly, we find but few abstract ideas. A system of truth is not known. Abstract thought will always be found in proportion to the advancement made in language, and language will become the more subtle and refined as thought progresses. The veriest shade of idea has embodiment in some subtle expression, and it is in the expression that the idea itself is formed to the mind. A thought often lies in the state of a feeling till a word, or words, evoke it from its recesses, and we find that these express the very thought which existed before but in effect,—*the effect in this instance seeming to precede the cause.* It is to Imagination and abstract Reason, particularly, that language is such a mighty succedaneum. There is a period of its history when Imagination has to do with outward forms and semblances, as expressive of inward thoughts and feelings; but there comes a time when the most

subtle and evanescent feelings or conceptions are made the symbols of material objects or ideas; or these objects or ideas are expressed or conveyed under the most subtle conceptions of the mind. Between Homer and Wordsworth, or Shelley, there seems the interval to which we have here alluded: Shakspeare may be said to unite the two periods. Terms are applied to objects or circumstances to which they could never have been suitable, but for the abstract sense that has been assigned to them, from the subtle analogies which the mind can perceive between even the most material and the most spiritual circumstances or objects. The power of perceiving analogies, Abstraction, Generalization, are the powers by which thought is so refined, and may be so large and general. The subtlest analogies are seen between mind and matter, and between matter and mind, between different objects and appearances in the material world, and between different states of the mental. An abstraction takes place, and whatever is non-essential in any observation of phenomena is at once discarded: a generalization takes place, and an observation becomes as wide as the universe. It is thus that the mind proceeds, whatever may be the objects with which it deals, whatever the subjects with which it is conversant. The progress from a rude and ignorant state to one of enlightenment and civilization is just the progress we have briefly indicated. There are first those imperfect generalizations by which objects are classified, their uses discerned, and their laws to some extent ascertained and determined. Nature becomes the minister of man, obeys his commands, and subserves his uses. Communities are formed: nations dwell on the earth. The sciences are the offspring of physical wants, and afterwards become the instructors and companions of those whose wants gave them birth. The Creator has established the most beautiful laws in nature, among those objects which he has rendered subservient to his creature, Man. There is nothing but his law, and which does not serve its purpose, in a regulated system which sprang from God, and which still depends upon him. Man cannot make any progress in social existence without developing these laws, acquainting himself with the order and constitution of nature.—The practical arts of life are but the application of these laws to the purposes of life. These take place, or are practised, long before there is strictly speaking science to regulate art, although art can never be separated from a certain degree or amount of science, or knowledge.—Science is knowledge systematized, or based upon principles—the knowledge of laws, not of facts merely, the evolution of these laws. In time science regulates art, or rises upon its rules. Egypt seems to have been the land where Science and Art had their first triumphs, or first made

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any progress. Egypt had far advanced in the arts ere Israel had yet become a nation, or even the great progenitor of that race was called; and the sciences flourished in Egypt, Phœnicia, and Chaldea, before the first Colonizers of Greece had founded Argos and Attica. The invention of letters is ascribed to the Phœnicians, while the priests of Sais locked up in hieroglyphics the knowledge which they meant to keep from the people. It was in Greece that the struggle of mind took place, and that science and art reached their crowning height. Phœnicia gave Cadmus to Bœotia; Egypt gave Cœrops to Attica; and all the greater men who led the mind of Greece were indebted to these countries, and to Chaldea, for much of that wisdom which made Greece what it was called—the eye of the world. Chaldea, at a very early period, devoted herself to the observation of the stars; but this not so much for the purposes of true science as for those of divination, or foretelling the future from certain conjunctions of the heavenly bodies; so that Astrology, rather than Astronomy, was the science of the Magi. To Egypt and Chaldea the sages and philosophers of Greece resorted, to acquire all that could be learned from these more ancient, and early renowned countries. Thales, and Pythagoras, and Plato, all travelled thither, and, it is thought, were not without help from the Hebrew Scriptures, which they saw or studied for themselves, or whose contents were in some degree communicated to them by those who had seen them. Plato makes Socrates say to his disciples—that for the higher doctrines of theology, they must go to the Barbarians. Judea was a singular exception to the rest of the world, in possessing a divinely revealed system of truth—forming a marvellous contrast to the absurdities that prevailed all around, and even to the best systems which enlightened Greece could boast. To this land were committed the oracles of God, as well as pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises. The Jews possessed no literature or philosophy distinct from their sacred writings. Was this a disadvantage?—or what was the explanation of this? Are learning and philosophy useless? Was it not intended that the people of God should possess either the one or the other? Did God thus put his stamp of disapproval upon all human learning and philosophy?—This could not be. Other nations, indeed, than the Jews wrought out the results of human thought; and we have seen that Chaldea and Egypt led the van in this grand progress, in this early march of intellect.—Greece followed, and it was her sages and philosophers particularly that carried forward the great progress of human ideas. It was for another purpose that the Jews were selected as a people, and it was a dif-

ferent experiment that was carried on within the limits of their sacred land. An altogether different direction was given to the mind of the Jews. They were under perpetual miraculous guidance : God spake to them out of the cloud, and by his prophets : He gave them His oracles : He appointed both their civil and religious polity. They had first the journey of the Wilderness, and then the conquests of Canaan, to achieve : one grand object was kept before them in their typical institutions : and it was altogether a task for others to perform, to work out the problems of human intellect. But do we not see more than philosophy in the sacred writings ? And do not the Songs of Zion, or the rapt strains of prophecy, surpass still all the products of imagination ? It may be fairly made a question, indeed, whether, if the world had continued in its primitive innocence ; had there been no apostacy ; if man had not wandered from his God ; there would have been problems of human intellect to solve. For, what are these problems, or what is all philosophy, but the gropings of the human mind after truths which would have been the common attainment, or familiar possession, of a state of innocence ? Room, no doubt, would have been left for the excursions of intellect, and the wanderings of fancy ; for there must, in any state, be much for the intellect to attain, and on which the imagination or fancy might be exercised. But instead of beginning where human intellect now commences, the mind would have been in the possession of all those truths, of a moral and spiritual kind at least, which philosophy vainly struggled to attain, which may be discerned by the intellect, but before it could discern or perceive which, it would seem, the light of revelation was necessary to purge the intellectual vision. But the utility of human learning and philosophy is to be decided by the state in which man is now placed. Even the Scriptures do not supersede these in every matter which may come within the scope of the intellect. The Scriptures do not inform us, for example, on the subjects of any of the physical sciences, though its statements may be found in marvellous harmony with them. Nor do they supersede the inquiries into the structure of our mental and moral nature, though here again there is a beautiful coincidence, and the best views of our mental and moral constitution, will be found in unison with the great truths of Scripture, and will but help us in their study, and assist us in their elucidation. The most idealistic system of Metaphysics, even—which gives us the laws of the creative mind, as at least underlying every thing, if we should not go so far as to say that nothing exists but these laws, and mind that created them, and mind that observes them—such a system is not without its use in the right system of all truth :

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may, we would say, it is the very view which an enlightened philosophy is compelled to take, and suggests to us the sublimest conceptions of the pervading power of God, and of a presence in every law, which is nothing else than God himself. We do not say that the law is God himself; but God is in the law. The progress of human philosophy, therefore, is the progress of mind in a perfectly legitimate department of inquiry; while physical science would have been a study in a state of innocence, perhaps, though pursued in different circumstances, and under different conditions. We can easily perceive, therefore, that all these are just the legitimate exercise of mind in the circumstances in which man is now placed, in the world in which he is now situated. He solves the problem of his condition—he looks to earth and heaven, and seeks to know the laws of those objects by which he is surrounded, nay, of those very lights which spangle his firmament. The growth and structure of human society—the nature of the individual mind, and the rights and laws of that mind, brought into systematic regulation and harmonious action in the social state, with a strict regard to those causes which may impede the one, and disturb the other: the *history* of human society—the events that have attended its progress—the migrations of our race, left to wander in an orphan condition—the wars and quarrels of the human family—the different languages that have arisen out of the divisions which dispersed man over the earth—national modifications: the efforts of mind, uttering in song, or expressing in art, its imaginative creations, and modulated conceptions: History and philosophy—poetry and oratory—legislation—the arts and sciences, arising in the course of human progress, and adorning and ameliorating human existence: these are the great departments of human thought, and become the subjects of human study.

Another field of thought opens up, whether to the speculative mind, or in answer to the urgent wants, and deep surmisings, of our nature. The philosophy was the theology of the ancients. They had, no doubt, certain traditional truths which were handed down from the earliest ages, and formed part of the original stock of knowledge possessed by the primitive fathers of the world, though greatly corrupted by the descent. But their inquiries into the nature of God, and virtue, and immortality, were part of their philosophic systems, or entered into their philosophic investigations. Revelation has taken up this department of inquiry, and has superseded, for the most part, mere human speculation. The science of theology, however, though now contained within the pages of the Bible, is not the less a legitimate department of thought; while all that can be fairly apprehended by reason—or what is called natural the-

ology—is a distinct and independant subject of investigation, and may legitimately occupy the faculties apart from the aid or the light of scripture. Revelation, however, has introduced a new element of thought, and has originated many new departments of inquiry. Biblical and sacred literature, Scripture criticism, the Canons of interpretation, the doctrines of Theology, properly so called, Church History, and the philosophy of Church History, or of the various systems and institutions that have arisen in connection with the progress of the Church, or her existence on the earth—open up wide and interesting fields of meditation. In some sense, theology compasses every other subject. Its bearings upon philosophy are obvious. Profane history is intimately blended with sacred, and cannot be comprehended, often, but upon christian principles, or from its connection with the grander destinies of our race. While in a certain sense, revelation supersedes moral investigation, and, were its principles embraced, would render political theories unnecessary, it supplies the only key by which the mysteries of the moral world can be solved, and might guide and teach all legislation. Is not the spiritual the highest part of man's nature, for which even the mental is subordinate? Is not literature itself—are not science and art—incomplete without their relations to universal truth?—and what is most valuable in poetry, or in any of the creations of imagination—is it not so, from its being permanent and eternal? The beauty of poetry is the beauty of eternal ideas, which existed in the Divine mind, and the symbols of which are everywhere spread around us.—What is temporary, whether in literature or in art, is not genuine, and is the offspring of evil. In the following admirable sentences of Sir James Stephen we have a true estimate of theology, when he speaks of it as—"A science which to many a simple mind compensated for the want of any other philosophy, and which to the best and ripest scholars disclosed the fountains whence all the streams of truth are salient, and the boundless expanse of knowledge towards which they are all convergent. It was the science", he says, "of which God himself was the author, and men sent of God the interpreters, and revelation, conscience, and history, the record. It was that science which explains the internal connexion of this world's history, in which law, and ethics, and politics, have their common basis, which alone imparts to poetry and art their loftier character, without which, the knowledge of mind and of mental operations is an empty boast, and even the severer problems of the world's material economy are insoluble".

Are we not warranted, then, to say that both utility and pleasure accrue to us from the study of these subjects? Ought we to be ignorant

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of them? Shall we not know the results of human progress? Shall we not study the science of mind—the science of external nature? Shall we not read the history of ages? Shall we not trace the stream of time? Shall we not contemplate man in all his states and conditions? Shall we not follow those early migrations, and watch their progress to flourishing communities? Shall Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome—these elder countries—awaken no interest? Shall the language of these nations, their civil polity, their religion, their philosophy, their science, their art—the words in which they spake, and conveyed their ideas, their laws of government, their peculiar institutions, their modes of belief and worship, their philosophic theories—often wild and fantastic, but always bold and inventive—their remains of science and art, which astound even at the present day, and the principles of which seem to have perished with them, till revived at a comparatively recent date, or till others were discovered in their stead—not obtain a portion of our attention, or excite our curiosity? And shall not the two thousand years since, the events that have transpired in that time, the fall of empires, the rise of dynasties, the progress of philosophic systems, the mighty revolutions of thought, the advances of science, the still increasing colonization of the world, the yet greater predestined triumphs of knowledge:—shall not all these engage our attention, and interest our minds? It is to this that study invites. This is the field laid open to us. It is not a vain pursuit. It is not unworthy of intellect. It is not idle or useless. It is important, it is ennobling, it is necessary. The field must be occupied. Who are the minds to occupy it? Who is to carry forward science, to increase philosophy, to advance the conquests of mind, to take the regulation of States, or be the pioneers of improvement? It is obvious that study fits for action. We must know something if we would be useful in the world, and the question is—how much ought we to know? There is, no doubt, another current of a very different progress, and in a very different direction; but God has designed that the one should be carried forward parallel with the other. For a long period their parallel course was national: in other words, Judea was the nation in which alone there was the progress of the one, while the rest of the nations were left to carry forward the other as they best might, not, however, independant of the controlling direction of Providence. Now their parallel course is individual, or in individual minds of all nations both currents may be flowing on; and temporal and eternal destinies may progress in the same minds, in the same communities, in the same nations, all over the earth. Man's physical and intellectual development

is not inconsistent with his moral and his spiritual. Each may keep pace with the other; nor was it designed that the one should interfere with the other. In this world there is nothing that may not interfere with our paramount, our spiritual, interests; but that interference is not in the apparently clashing interests themselves, but in the sphere of their operation; it is not that the interests are conflicting, but that the mind allows them to be so. Man's spiritual destiny is to be wrought out in that very conflict; or the mind is not to be unimproved—it is not to be uninformed—because the soul has its eternal destinies to retrieve. The soul has, indeed, its eternal destinies to retrieve, but the world must exist, and it must exist either in a state of progress, or one of retrogression. It will not be permitted to exist in the latter: has God intended that the advancement of the world in all mental and physical improvement should depend upon, or be consistent with, only a state of enmity to himself, indifference to his glory, and disregard for those interests which belong to the soul's immortal happiness? Surely not. And how much is there not for those who have undergone that change which is the one great interest to which we have adverted, to do, in directing the progress of science, the advancement of philosophy, the improvement of art, and all human amelioration, that the very interest which is so important may not be injured, and its claims may not be disparaged? It is a sign of the times, that the claims of religion—of christianity—are respected by those who are foremost in the ranks of learning and of science. Philosophy, too, has, by its deepest researches, only strengthened the foundations of religion, by confirming its principles; or it has, by its researches, arrived at the very wants of the spiritual nature in which these foundations are laid. It is not to be forgotten, likewise, that science and Philosophy have to do with the works of God, and that in studying these, we are but studying his works, acquainting ourselves more with himself, and unfolding the laws, as it were, of his action, or by which he was guided in all his works. We are seeing the mind of God. We see the system of his operation. *We see the laws of all mind.* We enter into the spiritual arcana, and find the processes by which every intelligent is directed, and must be directed. Intellectual law, and moral law, unfold themselves; and there is such a harmony between these and outward nature, that it would seem as if the universe was but the development of mind, answering to its laws, and beautifully reflecting its very ideas. We see the very ideas of the Divine mind in the Divine works: we can trace its principles; we can learn its sentiments, if we may so speak, its very feelings. It is not wisdom only that we discern—we recognise the very ideas of that wisdom: it is not only good-

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ness that we perceive—it is the separate designs of that goodness, its minutest ideas, and the very tenderness, often, the very sentiment or feeling, with which they were accompanied.* To discern God in all his works is surely a great object, and can it be a matter of indifference to know his works in order to discern him! Perhaps, we are too apt to forget the claims of God in Nature, because of the superior manifestations of him in Grace. There is too great a tendency to disparage the one, because of the more overwhelming demonstrations of the other. It was not thus with the Psalmist. He looked up to the heavens which God had made, to the moon and the stars which he had ordained, and he learned his lessons of piety from these. He rejoiced in the poetic beauties of creation; and made them express his feelings of devotion, and utter the language of the most spiritual experiences. And we believe, the more scientific our acquaintance with God's works, we shall see God more in them, we shall be brought more into immediate contact with the Divine Being—not with a law, or a principle, but with a personal God—we shall behold more to admire, and we shall have the greater reason to exclaim: "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord, God, Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints"! It is interesting to mark the connexion in these words of the heavenly worshippers. God is obviously recognised both in nature and in grace. It is when we combine both that our adoration is complete, that the whole cords of devotion are swept. And why should not both be combined? Why should any of the works of God be overlooked? And what lessons of experience are to be derived from the great events of this world's history? In the enlightened contemplation of this department of thought God is seen in new aspects, or in the same aspects in new circumstances. The destinies of the world but unfold the principles which guide the Divine Being in his varied procedure. God in history is no figment; and history is not read as it ought to be if God is not discerned. It becomes every one, and especially those who, in any way, are to be the guides and instructors of others, to study all by which God makes himself known. Learning and science add to our comprehension of the Divine nature—increase our acquaintance with the Divine procedure—correct our views where they have been wrong, exalt them where they have been unworthy. Science has a wonderful effect even in increasing our admiration of God. In our studies, how-

* Wordsworth speaks of

"The innocent brightness of a new-born day";
and Cousin, the French Philosopher, asks—"if it is not the expression of beneficence and of grandeur that constitutes the beauty of the sunlight"?

ever, we also enlarge and liberalize our ideas of man : we have a wider survey of our species—more insight into the springs of action ; while we may have models for imitation, examples for encouragement, and lessons for warning. The mind itself is enlarged, its faculties are improved, its sources of enjoyment multiplied, its happiness refined ; the materials of reason and imagination are extended ; and the whole intellectual being is furnished and equipped. But while this is true, and we should be excited to the greatest diligence in providing and improving our minds in all the separate departments of human thought and human learning, it is not to be forgotten that religion, and the religion of Christ, is the most important of all studies, while it is the highest and the grandest. To it our first and our last study should be devoted ; but it will be found in beautiful harmony with every other subject of study : it will receive tribute from every department of truth ; and the very exercises of the soul in its most spiritual workings will be consistent with the previously ascertained laws and phenomena of its constitution.

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MR. ALEXANDER MCKAY,	New Glasgow.
MR. JAMES FOWLER,	Miramichi, N. B.
MR. DONALD SUTHERLAND,	Earltown.
MR. JOHN McDONALD,	Cape Breton.
MR. WILLIAM SINCLAIR,	St. Mary's.
MR. WILLIAM DAVIES,	Halifax.
MR. G. N. GORDON,	Prince Edward's Island.
MR. CHARLES ROSS,	Pictou.
MR. DANIEL SUTHERLAND,	New Glasgow.
MR. ALEXANDER MCKAY,	Earltown.
MR. D. MCNIEL,	Cape Breton.
MR. ADAM FORBES,	St. Mary's.
MR. HUGH MCKAY,	Earltown.